



Inside Ag

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How to Read Pet Food Labels



There are many pet food choices available to consumers. To help you to make this decision, an understanding of the information on the label is important. The following is a list of information that must appear on each pet food product label and a brief explanation of the labeling requirements:

Product Name

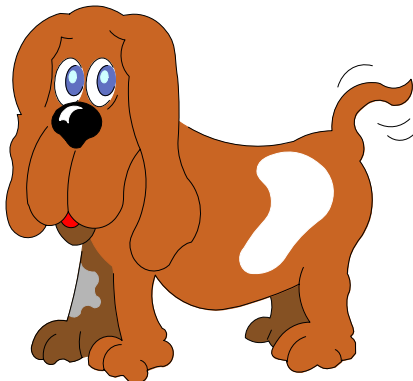
The product name is the *first* part of the label that is noticed by the consumer and it plays a big role in identifying the amount of key ingredients that are in the pet food. There are State rules and regulations that pet food manufacturers must follow when naming their products, so that consumers can determine how much of a named ingredient is in the food.

For example, a pet food named "**Colorado Beef for Dogs**" must contain at least 95% beef; not beef by-products. This is referred to as the "*95% rule*" and applies to meat, poultry, or fish if one of these ingredients forms part of the product name. Products named in this way are usually canned.

If a pet food is named "**Beef Dinner for Dogs**," the "*25% rule*" applies. In this example, beef must comprise at least 25% of the product. Many descriptors other than "dinner" are used for the 25% rule, including "platter," "entrée," "recipe," and "formula." These descriptors are typically used in the names of canned and dry products.

The "*3% rule*," also referred to as the "*with rule*" applies to ingredients that are highlighted on the label but not part of the product name. If a product is named "Beef Dinner for Dogs," but next to the name, "**with Bacon**," the product must contain at least 3% bacon. If the label reads "**with Bacon and Cheese**," it must contain at least 3% bacon and 3% cheese.

If a product name is regulated under the "*flavor rule*," the pet food does not have to contain the ingredient named with "flavor," but must contain enough flavoring agent to impart the taste of the named ingredient. An example would be a product named "**Bacon Flavored Dog Crackers**." This product would not have to contain bacon, but might contain "artificial bacon flavor" as the source of the flavor. The source of the flavoring must be identified in the ingredient list if it is not readily apparent.



Nutritional Adequacy Statement

All pet food labels must list a nutritional adequacy statement. This is probably the most important information on the label. A nutritional adequacy statement informs the consumer about the suitability of a food to meet a pet's nutritional needs, and if the product is a supplement, treat, or intended to be fed as the pet's sole diet. A "complete and balanced" dog and cat food must be proven for nutritional adequacy by one of two methods: it is formulated to provide levels of nutrients that meet an [Association of American Feed Control Officials](#) established profile, or it was the test product that successfully completed a scientific feeding trial. Either method is proof that the product is nutritionally complete to meet the nutritional needs of the cat or dog during one or all life stages. The nutritional adequacy statement on a pet food label must also include the life stage for which the product is formulated, such as "complete and balanced for all stages of life" or "for growing puppies." Life stages for dogs and cats are classified as "growth and reproduction" or "maintenance."

Other Label Claims

Other claims that may appear on pet food labels are "low fat," "lite" or "light," or "natural." "Low fat," "lite," and "light" claims may only be used if the product meets Colorado's specific rules and regulations for fat content and/or caloric density labeling.

If a pet food label bears the claim "all natural," the product cannot contain any artificial ingredients, including colors and/or flavors, or synthetic vitamins.

For other label claims, such as "organic," the pet food manufacturer must be able to substantiate the claim with sufficient scientific or other documentation that is acceptable to the Colorado Dept. of Agriculture.

Drug claims, such as "for relief of arthritis," are not allowed on any animal feed labels unless the product or active ingredient has been proven to be safe and effective, and approved by the FDA as a drug.



The Colorado Dept. of Agriculture's Feed Program provides consumer protection for users of livestock and pet foods. Assurance of proper feed labeling that conforms to the Feed Program's rules is just one of many responsibilities of the Feed Program.

For examples of correct pet food label format and other information on the Colorado Dept. of Agriculture's Feed Program, go to the [CDA Feed Program website](#).

Consumers need to know what is in a pet food when choosing their dog or cat's daily diet. Understanding pet food labels is a key factor when making this decision.

Be an informed pet owner! Read the label!